

Claims

I claim:

1. A method for allowing a user at a first location to access devices at a second location via an electronic data network, comprising the steps of:
accepting an incoming communication from the user over the electronic data network;

receiving a user selection of a device over the electronic data network;
receiving a user selection of a function of the device over the electronic data network;
sending the user selection of the function to the device;
receiving a response from the device to the device function; and
sending the response to the user over the electronic data network.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of accepting the incoming communication comprises accepting the incoming communication from the user over the Internet.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of receiving a user selection of a device comprises receiving the user selection of the device over the Internet.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of receiving a user selection of a function comprises receiving the user selection of the function over the Internet.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of sending the response to the user comprises sending the response to the user over the Internet.

6. A method for allowing a user having a portable communications device at a first location to conduct business by using telephone facilities available at a second location, comprising the steps of:

accepting an incoming communication from a calling party, the incoming communication being to a telephone number for the user at the second location;
determining an identity for the calling party;
determining the first location;

if the calling party is a predetermined person then placing a call to the portable communications device and sending the identity for the calling party to the portable communications device;

accepting an instruction from the portable communications device as to the treatment of the incoming communication;

handling the incoming communication in accordance with the instruction; and

monitoring for additional instructions from the portable communications device.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein the step of placing a call to the portable communications device comprises establishing a connection to the portable communications device using an electronic data network.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein the step of placing a call to the portable communications device comprises establishing a connection to the portable communications device using the Internet.

9. A method for allowing a user having a portable communications device at a first location to conduct business by using telephone facilities available at a second location, comprising the steps of:

accepting an incoming communication on a communications link from the second location;

accepting an identity for a calling party who has placed an incoming communication to the user, the incoming communication being to a telephone number for the user at the second location;

presenting the identity for the calling party to the user;

accepting an instruction from the user as to the treatment of the incoming communication;

sending the instruction to the second location;

handling the incoming communication in accordance with the instruction; and

monitoring for additional instructions from the user.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein the step of handling the incoming communication comprises:

if the instruction is to connect the calling party with the user then establishing a voice channel between the user and the calling party using the communications link.

11. The method of claim 9 wherein the step of presenting the identity for the calling party comprises sending the identity for the calling party to the user over an electronic data network.

12. The method of claim 9 wherein the step of presenting the identity for the calling party comprises sending the identity for the calling party to the user over the Internet.

13. The method of claim 9 wherein the step of accepting an instruction from the user comprises accepting the instruction from the user over an electronic data network.

14. The method of claim 9 wherein the step of accepting an instruction from the user comprises accepting the instruction from the user over the Internet.

15. A method for allowing a user having a portable communications device at a first location to conduct business by using telephone facilities available at a second location, comprising the steps of:

accepting an incoming communication from a calling party, the incoming communication being to a telephone number for the user at the second location; determining the first location;

if the calling party is a predetermined person then placing a call to the portable communications device;

accepting an instruction from the portable communications device as to the treatment of the incoming communication;

handling the incoming communication in accordance with the instruction; and

monitoring for additional instructions from the portable communications device.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the step of placing a call to the portable communications device comprises establishing a connection to the portable communications device using an electronic data network.

17. The method of claim 15 wherein the step of placing a call to the portable communications device comprises establishing a connection to the portable communications device using the Internet.

18. A method for allowing a user having a portable communications device at a first location to conduct business by using telephone facilities available at a second location, comprising the steps of:

accepting an incoming communication on a communications link from the second location, the incoming communication being to a telephone number for the user at the second location;

accepting an instruction from the user as to the treatment of the incoming communication;

sending the instruction to the second location;

handling the incoming communication in accordance with the instruction; and

monitoring for additional instructions from the user.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein the step of handling the incoming communication comprises:

if the instruction is to connect the calling party with the user then establishing a voice channel between the user and the calling party using the communications link.

20. A method for allowing a user at a first location to access devices at a second location by using a first electronic data network, the devices comprising a first set of devices connected to a telephone network at the second location and a second set of devices connected to a second electronic data network at the second location, the second location comprising a telephone controller for controlling the operation of the telephone network and a data controller for controlling the operation of the second electronic data network, the method comprising the steps of:

accepting an incoming communication from the user over the first electronic data network;

receiving a user selection of a device;

if the device is in the first set of devices, then connecting the incoming communication to the telephone controller; and

if the device is in the second set of devices, then connecting the incoming communication to the data controller.

21. The method of claim 20 and further comprising the steps of:
receiving a user selection of a function of the device;
sending the user selection of the function to the connected controller;
receiving a response from the connected controller to the device
function; and
sending the response to the user over the first electronic data network.

22. The method of claim 20 wherein the selected device is a first device, and further comprising the steps of:

monitoring the incoming communication for a subsequent user selection of a second device; and

if the second device is in a different set of devices than the first device, then also connecting the incoming communication to the controller for the different set of devices.

23. The method of claim 20 wherein the selected device is a first device associated with a first controller, and further comprising the steps of:

monitoring the incoming communication for a subsequent user selection of a second device; and

if the second device is in a different set of devices than the first device, then terminating the connection of the incoming communication to the first controller and connecting the incoming communication to the controller for the different set of devices.

24. The method of claim 20 wherein the step of accepting an incoming communication comprises accepting an incoming communication over the Internet.

25. An apparatus for allowing a user at a first location to remotely access selected devices at a second location by using a first electronic data network, comprising:

a first set of devices connected to a telephone network at the second location;

a telephone controller connected to the telephone network and to the first set of devices for controlling the operation of the telephone network;

a second set of devices connected to a second electronic data network at the second location;

a data controller connected to the second electronic data network and to the second set of devices for controlling the operation of the data network; and

an access controller for receiving an incoming communication from the user over the first electronic data network, for receiving a user selection of a device over the first electronic data network, for connecting the incoming communication to the telephone controller if the selected device is in the first set of devices, and for connecting the incoming communication to the data controller if the selected device is in the second set of devices.

26. The apparatus of claim 25 wherein the first electronic data network is the Internet.